

WALDORF, MD - Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) and Congressman Ben Cardin (D-MD), a recognized Medicare expert, today met with seniors at Victoria Park Apartments in Waldorf to discuss the upcoming Medicare prescription drug deadline.

Both members have requested that the Bush Administration extend the penalty-free enrollment period for the new, complex Medicare prescription drug plan from May 15 to January 1, 2007.

“The cost of prescription drugs in this country has skyrocketed beyond what most American families can afford, and it is imperative that we extend the time allotted for seniors to enroll in the Medicare prescription drug plan,” Hoyer said. “With the deadline only a week away, it remains patently unfair that seniors who are unable to navigate the plan’s enrollment labyrinth are penalized with what amounts to a ‘Bush Prescription Drug Tax.’”

Extending the deadline for enrollment will ensure that more than 200,000 seniors and people with disabilities in Maryland are not forced to pay the Bush prescription drug tax and higher premiums for life.

“The prescription drug penalty adds insult to injury for America’s seniors,” Cardin said. “Maryland seniors have one week to sort through all the confusing drug plans or they may be slapped with a penalty that they’ll have to pay for the rest of their lives. We must extend the enrollment deadline. Maryland seniors can’t afford this penalty and don’t deserve it.”

Maryland seniors are facing an overwhelming array of choices: 19 different companies offering 47 different plans with monthly premiums that vary from \$6.44 to \$68.91, as well as a Medicare managed care option called MedicareAdvantage.

Furthermore, the Government Accountability Office recently issued a report finding that information provided by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) was beyond the comprehension of most seniors. In response to the critical question of which plan offered the lowest cost for a given list of drugs, CMS hotline operators failed to provide the correct answer 60% of the time.

The Kaiser Family Foundation also found that only 55% of seniors know about the May 15 deadline. The rest either did not know there was a deadline, or had incorrect information about it.

“Democrats wanted a different law,” Hoyer said. “We wanted to simply add a prescription drug benefit to the existing Medicare program. And we wanted it run exactly like the Medicare Part B seniors already knew: in which they pay 20 percent and Medicare pays 80 percent. The Republican plan has been a confusing and frustrating experience for many—and I will do everything in my power to help seniors from the 5th Congressional district avoid this outrageous penalty.”

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